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Title of Interview Interview with Effie Ross

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Person Interviewed: Ross Effie Louise
Full Name Last First Middle
Known by any other names? (list) _____
Date of Birth 7-6-1950

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State County City/Community Time Period/Years

Person as Subjects within the Interview:

Title Last Name First Middle DOB

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Interview with Effie Ross

Interviewed by: Amy Roberts

Date of Interview: March 9, 2012

Biography

Effie Ross was a native of Southern California. In 1977, at the age of 27, she and her family picked up and moved to the northwestern corner of Arkansas. There she began farming near the Missouri state line. The nearest town to their property was the small town of Gravette, AR. There she enrolled her two school-aged children in the public school. She later became an important figure in the Church of Christ in Gravette as well as in the community overall. In more recent years Effie moved inside Gravette city limits where she resides with her mother and sister. She has had several different careers including working for the school and owning gas stations in Gravette, but currently she works as a caregiver for the elderly members of the Gravette community. During her time in Northwest Arkansas she has witnessed the decline of agriculture and in relation to that the growth of economic development in the area.

Side A

Roberts: And if you could, just state your name for me.

Ross: My name's Effie Ross.

Roberts: And where do you live?

Ross: I live in Gravette, Arkansas

Roberts: How long have you lived here?

Ross: Since 1977.

Roberts: Wow.

Ross: Yeah, I came from Southern California to Gravette.

Roberts: Where at?

Ross: In Anaheim, about three miles from Disneyland.

Roberts: Oh wow, so you went from big city to farmland Gravette.

Ross: You got that right.

Roberts: Can you tell me about the comparison between the two?

Ross: Well, where I lived there was not only housing everywhere, but there were malls everywhere. There were grocery stores. Within two blocks you had somewhere to shop or to you know, to get your groceries, and go to the gas station. And when I moved to the Gravette area I

was nine miles from Gravette itself. I was out in the county and I was 60 miles from the first mall, so it was quite a change.

Roberts: Wow, so how old were you when you moved to Gravette?

Ross: I was 27. And I'm 61 now, so I'll be 62 in July.

Roberts: And you had kids then?

Ross: I had two young kids. One was in 3rd grade. One was in 2nd grade.

Roberts: What was it like for them changing?

Ross: For my son who was the 3rd grader that was just the most wonderful thing in the world to be able to move on a farm. And for my daughter it was the most devastating thing in the world because she had lots of friends there. And it was city life, and most women like to shop. And even at 2nd grade she liked to shop, so it was quite devastating for her. But what we did, we moved from city life to country life and moved onto a farm of about 80,000 chickens and of about 100 cows. So you're going from one thing to another so they had to get around.

Roberts: Wow. So did you have to adjust with them like changing different school settings?

Ross: I think the hardest thing, the hardest adjustment probably for me was just the change of meeting new people because, of course, we're church affiliated and we had many friends our age there and coming back here in Gravette was just a little, tiny church. So we had to drive to Bentonville, 28 miles to go to church there to find what I felt I was needing. So for the first couple of years we did a lot of traveling. That was the main thing, but one of the greatest things was that you'd come back and you're driving down the road and everyone is waving at you. And you're thinking "Do I know them—do I know them?" Because where we were from you were

lucky if they said, “Hi.” And back here everyone’s so friendly. That was a good adjustment. It was something I felt like was needed and was meant to be.

Roberts: So would you say that the people here were more welcoming than the people in California?

Ross: Most definitely, most definitely friendlier and most definitely nosier. Ha ha! If that makes sense. They’re more to get into your life than they were out there. Unless you were in the church, you know going to church. And then you know everyone kind of stayed together in the church out there. And it was very friendly, but to know people as you are going down the street or anything, or even in your neighborhood for them to be out, visiting and talking that just didn’t happen all the time. Whereas here you could come into town and everybody would be, “Oh, who are you? You haven’t been here before.” So much different as far as friendliness and as far as being that this is considered the “Bible Belt”. It was amazing to me how many churches in a little town we had, and how everyone would say, “I go to church. I go to church.” And out there on Sunday you were going to church and everyone was out watering their yards and whatever. And that was a good thing that was a good thing.

Roberts: So were there as many churches in Gravette when you moved here as there are now?

Ross: Well, um, when we moved here there was probably three new churches in Gravette since I, since I moved here, and I forget, there was a count, a while back, of how many churches in this small town. Just a little over 2,000 people [in Gravette] right now. When I moved back here it was barely 1,200 people. So it’s now up to a little over 2,000 people, and someone said they counted up to 17 churches in Gravette, which is quite a few churches for such a small town.

Roberts: Would you just tell me about the change you've seen in the Gravette area the whole time, like through the years you've been here?

Ross: When I came back in 1977 this area in I'd say a good portion of Northwest Arkansas was farming and chicken growing, turkey growing also, and also pigs. They had a lot of hog farms and a lot of turkey farms. So we were back here in agriculture mainly. When things started getting bad, the economy started getting bad, you started seeing the hog houses closing. You started seeing very few turkey houses left. And just recently, just the last three years, many of the chicken houses have closed down. Just in the last two years people are selling out of cattle. And what I'm seeing, I'm seeing where people are going more toward industrial, and getting more away from farming because they can't make a living. And I'm kind of sad about that because I like the area being farm-like and everything. But as you go in this area you can drive around and a lot of your fields are empty now. Before there was cattle everywhere and the smell of chicken houses everywhere. I'm not saying that was good, but the hog houses were worse. So the hog houses being gone haven't bothered me so much because of that smell. But just the difference in the home, you know, even in the home living, the farming people they're just so much more relaxed. Even though farm life is very, very busy, and you don't have a lot of time. I just see what people that are all around they are just getting busier. And one of the things I like back here was that it was a slow pace compared to California, but it's getting busier.

Roberts: So you used to live on a farm, how big was that?

Ross: The farm that we had when we moved we had almost 1,400 acres. I actually still own 420 acres that I'm trying to sell right now, but we moved into Gravette itself. We moved here eight

years ago, so I have been off the farm for eight years. But still have someone running the one farm, leasing it.

Roberts: Do you miss the farm life?

Ross: Sometimes, sometimes I really miss the farm life. With the kids being older I don't miss it as much because I feel like God just sent us back here and got the kids out of the type of environment that was in southern California. And I feel like it gave my children a lot better chance of making something of themselves being in a smaller community where they had more attention from their teachers, had more attention from the school staff. We just felt like we had more opportunities for the kids. I had one child born back here. She was born when we were on the farm and just loved it. So I feel like a part of me is that part, but being in town now that I'm older it's probably better that I'm not on a farm.

Roberts: Do you have any farm stories you would like to tell?

Ross: Well, you know, mainly on a farm people a lot of times don't realize that at one time I actually was raising 152,000 chickens by myself. People think about that and they're going, "How many?!" Yeah, 152,000. And so I went to into two of the houses one day, it was real hot, and the two houses were getting ready to sell. And I look in there and there were dead chickens everywhere. Those two houses together were 44,000 capacities. We picked up probably about 28,000 dead chickens just from the heat. So there was disaster on the farm and then there was fun things on the farm. We had horses. We had a little colt born which the kids thought was funny. One of the funniest things, and if my husband was still alive he would probably shoot me for telling this, but we allowed my daughter to have a little raccoon. Well, that little raccoon got bigger and bigger and we had to put it outside. It had been in the house, and we put it in the cage.

He decided to let her out, her name was Cupcake, and he decides to let her out to roam and she got, evidently, a little aggravated and climbed up his leg and bit him right on the seat of his pants. And he kept shaking his leg yelling, "Help me! Help me! Help me!" And all I could do was laugh because he was looking crazy and this coon was hanging on. Finally the coon jumped off and he jumped in the car and the coon jumped up the tree and we never put that coon back in a cage. It disappeared. That was probably one of the funniest things that happened on the farm was him trying to get that coon off the back of his leg. We had a few things. Some people who lived in Gravette begged us to take their goat. In fact, Amy, it was your great aunt and uncle that asked us to take their momma goat. So we told them, Maxine, that we would take their goat. We're on a farm. She didn't tell me that this goat was quite a pest and a pet. I came home from grocery shopping one day and open the trunk of my car and took two bags of groceries in, came back and the goat was in the middle of my trunk eating my groceries. So little things like that, but those are memories that a lot of people who live in town don't get. Fun things like that. Needless to say the goat went to some other house very quickly after that.

Roberts: How did you come across the raccoon in the first place?

Ross: Well, the kids' grandparents were here and it was my daughter's birthday. And the kids, their grandmother, thought it would be a really great thing for them to get her a pet. They had seen in the paper where there were some pet raccoons for sale. So they took her and told me that they were going to go get a pet. I wasn't caring, being on the farm. I didn't know it was going to be a raccoon, but here they come home with this little six week old raccoon. Well, what we didn't know because I was city girl was that when you have a raccoon in your house it is a domestic animal and it stinks up your whole house. Her bedroom was just a disaster after about three weeks. We walked in one day, the back, and after smelling something awful it dawned on

me: that raccoon. You just don't want one of those in the house, so that's why we ended up putting it in a cage outside. But that's how we ended up with that raccoon, and it was a birthday present. I'll tell you too we ended up with a pet pig one time. The same thing, it was her birthday again and her grandparents thought she needed a baby pig. So we get this baby pig and named it Penelope. And Penelope, within 6 months grew to be 330 pounds. Now, Penelope, you'd go out and she'd lay over for you to scratch her under her arms and around her neck. And at 330 pounds we weren't sure what we were going to do. So people think this is kind of cruel, but you know, hog meat is really good to eat, bacon. And we ended up when she was gone to school; we ended up taking it and slaughtering it and using it for our meat. To tell you the truth it was the best meat we ever had, but she never touched it. She wouldn't eat it.

Roberts: So you told her that it was Penelope?

Ross: Well she knew the pig was gone! Ha ha! And we had to tell her where it went. So she was mad, but you know when you're on a farm you have to eat. You have to eat and it was, uh it made very good pork chops and things like that. And so farm life, if anybody hasn't gotten to experience farm life, farm life is wonderful. It is very fun, a good experience.

Roberts: Did you have to learn everything on your own like how to take care of the chickens and all those animals?

Ross: What I did in California was that I was actually a secretary for a furnisher refinishing company and I did the keeping [of the books].

End side A

Side B

Ross: I had a refinishing, refurbishing job and secretaries we didn't work with animals at all, maybe a dog here or there or a cat here or there. So it was all brand new when I moved back. And the first thing that I ended up getting was two chicken houses and bringing baby chickens. Hadn't a clue what to do, not one clue. So they came out, the company came out, and showed me things to do. I thoroughly enjoyed raising chickens, but when I got more involved with cows I really enjoyed working cows too. So it was something that I had never done but I was just hoping to whatever I needed to do once we got back here. So it was very different, but a lot of fun.

Roberts: Were the neighbors helpful?

Ross: Well, when you're in the country usually your neighbor is down the road a block, three blocks. So we did meet some of our neighbors, but basically they were all busy with their chores too. We did find a couple people who would do cows as it picked up. We actually, I actually didn't work cows for about five years after we moved here. It was probably maybe about three years, I take that back, about three years after we moved here is when we basically started. We started slow. We did the chickens first and then, you know, we did the cattle part. It was different. And I also subbed at school all the time, so I was working in Gravette too and enjoyed the school system. Probably in Northwest Arkansas the school system, when we moved back, was a little bit behind what southern California was, but just more relaxed and more enjoyable. It was, like I said, it wasn't the fast pace that we had out there. One of the things that I do see different now is that the school system is different and there is a lot more traffic now than there was years ago. In the last few years actually it just seems like because we're in Walmart country that there's just tons more people. Tons more people. Also when we moved back here there

wasn't a lot of different races. Now there's a lot more races in our area than there used to be, so a lot of changes. A lot of changes.

Roberts: Do you think it's different like you're in Arkansas but you're so close to Missouri and then run over to Oklahoma to do something, but in California you were just in California?

Ross: That was probably one of the things I enjoyed the most because I did a lot of shopping in Missouri, Joplin, MO, because they had a mall. Where we lived we were exactly 60 miles from Fayetteville and 60 miles from Joplin, so I would do a lot of shopping in Joplin also. We'd have our times when we would go to Tulsa for different things. That was interesting because in California where we were at, kind of the middle of California, we were basically in southern California and we didn't go to northern California very often. And because shopping was a block away you didn't have to go 50 miles. Now the difference in that is the mileage you put on your car and also the gas that use for all of that traveling that you had to do. I could probably go three weeks on one tank of gas when I lived in California. I was usually putting in a tank and a half of gas sometimes two tanks a week when I moved back here. So that was quite a difference. The other thing that was so interesting and still is not very good, but here in northwestern Arkansas is the fact that in California urbans lit up at night. You had street lights everywhere. In the country, you know in your streets going from Bentonville to say, Gravette, there's no street lights. So you'd have to watch your curbs and everything. Make sure there's no deer in the street. You just have to be a little bit more cautious then as far as lighting. As far as vehicles it doesn't matter where you're at you have to be cautious. In California you had to watch out for the crazy drivers there as well as here. I did see a big difference in that though. That was hard to get used to.

Roberts: When you moved to this area did it seem safer? Because I know a lot of people talk about living out in the country they don't lock their doors or anything.

Ross: When we moved back here it was amazing, I really did feel safer. I didn't lock my doors when I was on the farm. I mean I just didn't even worry. Now we had only been back here three weeks—we lived up on a hill—and three weeks after we were here this car comes up and starts backing up to our house and almost hit our house. So that kind of scared us a little bit like what have we gotten into. We had a sheriff that lived right down the street, so he was at our house within two minutes. I called him and he was there. The guy was, the man, was drunk and didn't know where he was. He was all it was. So we never had anything stolen and we never locked up. Now living in Gravette we don't keep our house unlocked at all. I say 10 years ago I wouldn't have thought of locking my house even in town. But with the times changing I think all of the towns in all of the states are probably seeing more stealing with our economy the way it is. People needing things being out of work, so I think we just have to take more precaution. But the one thing that used to get me when I first came back here is that I'd go to the grocery store in Gravette and all the cars had their keys in the car. And it's like "They keep their keys in the car?!" We wouldn't have even thought about that out in California. I found myself doing the same thing after about three or four months. I'd leave my key in the car and go in. Well now you can't do that or your car is stolen. So you see a lot of differences in the years and really it's almost sad, a lot of sad differences because you can't be as trusting as you were before. But still I think all in all northwest Arkansas, the area we're in, it's still not as bad as so many places. If I had my brothers this is where I'd be. I can't even imagine leaving Northwest Arkansas.

Roberts: With the changes that have come about in this area would you say that they are mostly because of Walmart?

Ross: I would say a lot of them are because of Walmart. Probably about 98% of them which I'm grateful for Walmart to be building our economy the way they have. There's been some good things come out of it. But of course some of the building was because they made a community that was basically for retirement called Bella Vista. What I've seen is Bella Vista building up since I've been here because a lot of people come retired and there's wonderful golf courses around and these people like that. There's probably 97-98% Walmart but the opportunities for some of the people who retire too, not even meaning that they have to be in their 70's or 65. There's a lot of people who retire at 50, thanks to Walmart. I think that they have helped a lot. The chicken growing used to be one of the greatest things that helped people here, but now that's slowed down a lot. I'd say that keeping that going would be basically Walmart.

Roberts: Yeah. So what was Bella Vista and Bentonville like when you first moved here?

Ross: Bella Vista was not hardly developed to be honest with you. There might have been a few houses there. After I moved here they had three or four little bitty lakes and one good-sized one. Windsor Lake was the name of the good-sized one. I actually went several times and watched them building Loch Lomond, which that area there was just woods and nothing else. They tore that out, and around the lake they started building houses and a marina and a country club. So Bella Vista has built up to be, I don't even know what the population of Bella Vista is right now, but I know they're like Gravette they probably have, I was told from one of the senior activities centers there in Bella Vista that they have a church for every week of the year just in Bella Vista. So you're looking at 54 churches at least just in Bella Vista, so it has built up tremendously. Bentonville, I can remember when I came here to go from Bentonville to Rogers, AR there was not anything for like four or five miles and it was like, "Oh what a boring trip." Then from Rogers to Fayetteville on [Highway] 71 it was nothing. I mean it was like a 20 minute drive, a

20-30 minute drive with nothing to see, and it's all one big community now. You know when you change from Bentonville to Rogers you don't even know where that change is if you haven't lived here. And from Rogers to Lowell, from Lowell to Springdale all of that is just one big thing now. I've seen that growth. There again, there are other companies who have moved in, but I'm going to give Walmart a lot of credit on that, on helping families move in. Like I said there are nationalities here that were never here, and I believe Walmart brought several of those into... But now, we also have in Fayetteville the University of Arkansas, and we had several people move in just because their children were going there and they would find jobs. So the universities and the other thing we had when I first moved back here we had two hospitals. We had one in Gravette and one in Fayetteville called Washington Regional. We now have about six hospitals that go through the area which is a big change in health, and still not enough hospitals because so many people have moved in. We've been having a population explosion for a while.

Roberts: That's cool. Are there any things, like specific stories you'd like to tell?

Ross: Well, I think one of the things that is really important to me and I'm hoping is important to more people is that it is important to be around people that profess to be Christians. It's important to be around people who have a lot of morals and care. And I believe that being in this area I really found a lot of that. Seven years, eight years ago, actually I got involved with two convenient stores. Had two partners who bought two convenient stores in Gravette and ran them until two years ago when I was diagnosed with cancer. I found that there's a lot of good people that are in the area that are willing to talk about the Lord. And I think that experience is one of my favorites because, Amy you've known me a long time and you know I like to talk about God, so that's something that is probably my most precious experience is being able to share God with so many people and being able to help them. They would come in the store with their problems

and we would talk with them. That really is great. But now as time goes on I beat cancer and am now cancer free. I am now doing Home Palace and I absolutely love it. You know opportunities that I don't think I would have had in California. God is good and life is good because of Northwest Arkansas and the people in it.

Roberts: That's good, so you really enjoyed owning two shops here in Gravette?

Ross: I really did. I enjoyed having the convenience stores. I'm not saying for anyone to buy any because they're a pain, but I enjoyed people. So I enjoyed the people part. I didn't enjoy the regulations that the government has on everything.